



**TESTIMONY OF MATTHEW BROKMAN, COUNCIL 4 AFSCME**

**IN SUPPORT OF HB 5860: AA RECOGNIZING PROBATE COURT EMPLOYEES AS STATE EMPLOYEES**

**Labor and Public Employees Committee**

**February 17, 2015**

Senator Winfield, Representative Tercyak, Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Matthew Brokman. I am a Legislative and Political Representative for Council 4 AFSCME. On behalf of the 32,000 public service employees we represent, I want to thank you for holding this public hearing on proposed HB 5860: An Act Recognizing Probate Court Employees as State Employees.

In 2012, a number of probate court employees reached out to our union, Council 4 AFSCME, to work with them to give them a voice on the job. After members signed cards, we went to the State Labor Board to have their union officially recognized. However, the state labor board said that they could not recognize the union because the front-line staff of the probate courts are deemed not state employees. Since then we have turned to the legislature for your help in fixing this matter.

We've talked with hundreds of workers. We've heard support for this effort. They have told us stories of having certain benefits and then, following the consolidation, losing those benefits, not receiving raises for years, even working above their pay grades without compensation or even an ability to receive a promotion. These employees have no where to turn. While employees were once able to ask their judges to fix issues in the court; decisions regarding working conditions now rest solely with the Probate Court Administrator and Budget Committee. Having a union and the well-tested system that we have developed with the state of Connecticut over the years will help resolve these issues to the mutual benefit of the workers, the Judges, the Probate Court system and the public.

We fully support this proposed bill. As the committee looks to develop this concept, we have worked with the employees to come up with a few key principles that we hope can guide the legislation as it moves forward:

- Do no harm. Probate employees have a decent pension plan invested by the State Treasurer and managed by the Comptroller. To ensure the plan's stability and funding that should not change.
- Recognize probate employees as state employees to give them the respect they deserve.
- Make sure probate employees have the job security protections that are so important to a well-functioning court system
- Give these workers the right to decide for themselves whether or not to form a union and collectively bargain.

In response to this effort, we have heard a lot about how the clerks of the system deserve respect; that the courts would not function without them; new judges would be foolish to terminate them. If we really

believe that, then we should trust these employees with the right to decide for themselves about their future.

Finally, the US system for employees coming together to form a union allows for employees to keep their personal decision silent until they are ready to have a formal election. I think we all should applaud the workers that were willing to forgo their right to a secret ballot to publically state their support. This takes a tremendous amount of courage for "at will" employees.

Thank you. We look forward to working with this committee to develop this bill as it moves forward.